**Appendix for "What do ‘Left Behind Communities’ Want? A Qualitative Study in the United Kingdom using Photo Elicitation".**

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7. Coding the data.

The coding of the data was done by conversation, not by participant. Some of our conversations had multiple participants, but in our fieldwork notes they have been recorded as one conversation.[[1]](#footnote-1) We went through all the conversations manually, reading them one by one and noting each instance where there was a reaction centred on the bus or a reaction centred on the NHS or both. Conversations where there was no reaction centring on the bus or the NHS were not included. The coding of the data relied heavily on our personal interpretations of our own fieldwork notes, as well as each other’s fieldwork notes, which presented us with a challenge of interpretation. To avoid discrepancies in coding the data we coded a ‘control section’ of 20 conversations together following the same coding template and arrived at a mutually recognised and consistent coding method.

Each time we made a note of a reaction we included the participant number in the relevant column or columns above. All of the participant numbers in columns E-J (the various reactions to the bus, both positive and negative) are also in column C (all conversations with a reaction to the bus). The reaction centring on the bus can be both natural (led by the participant) or prompted (led by us). A natural reaction centred on the bus can be not knowing the bus previously but seeing the bus and reacting to the bus in the conversation. A natural reaction centred on the bus can also be knowing the bus already and reacting to the bus in the conversation. The participant numbers in column D (no reaction to the bus) are not included in any other column. There can be repetitions of the same participant number in multiple columns. This is because a participant can call the bus a lie and also have another nuanced negative reaction to the bus that is different from a lie. A participant can also have a positive and a negative reaction to the bus in the same conversation. All reactions in one conversation get recorded in all the appropriate columns. Only reactions to the NHS in particular are included in column K (all conversations with a reaction to the NHS). More general comments about health in general are not included. All the participant numbers in columns L-O (various reactions to the NHS) are contained in Column K. Some participants can have both a negative and a positive reaction to the NHS in the same conversation and their participant numbers will appear in multiple columns. All reactions in the conversation get recorded in all the relevant columns.

1. Meaning of columns.

Column C (Had a reaction to the bus): In this column we placed every conversation where the participant had a reaction centring on the bus. This means seeing the photo and proceeding to react to it with a verbal comment, in some instances a non-verbal reaction (for example, a loud tut), or a neutral descriptive reaction (for example, ‘it’s about Brexit’). Having a reaction, either verbal, non-verbal or descriptive is the key determinate for this column.

Column D (No reaction to the bus): In this column we placed every conversation where the participant did not recognise the bus and had no reaction centring on it, or possibly recognised the bus but had no reaction to it. Not having a reaction to the bus was the determinate for this column.

Column E (Called the bus ‘bullshit’): In this column we placed every conversation where the participant called the bus ‘bullshit’ in particular.

Column F (Called the bus ‘bollocks’): In this column we placed every conversation where the participant called the bus ‘bollocks’ in particular.

Column G (Called the bus ‘a lie’): In this column we placed every conversation where the participant called the bus ‘a lie’ in particular. In this column we also included ‘lies’, ‘absolute lie’, ‘complete lie’, etc. Using the word ‘lie’, in various forms and combinations with other words, was the determinate for this column.

Column H (Had a nuanced negative reaction to the bus): In this column we placed every conversation were the participant had a negative reaction to the bus that was not ‘bullshit’, ‘bollocks’ or ‘a lie’. These reactions can be very diverse: from ‘not true’ to more extreme negative reactions.[[2]](#footnote-2) Non-verbal reactions were also recorded in this column. Having a negative reaction expressed with different from the key words above words was determinate for this column.

Column I (Believed the bus): In this column we placed every conversation where the participant had a reaction that expressed their belief in the bus. These reactions can be verbally agreeing with the bus or not questioning the bus by accepting it as true or a good thing. Not expressing a negative reaction to the bus as described above, or expressing a positive reaction to the bus, as well as not questioning the validity of the bus was the determinate for this column.

Column J (Not believing the bus): In this column we placed every conversation where the participant expressed a reaction suggesting that they did not believe the bus. These reactions can be expressing a view that the promise on the bus would not come true, reactions different from the negative reactions described above.

Column K (Had a reaction to the NHS): In this column we placed every conversation where the participant had a reaction centring on the NHS in particular, meaning they specifically mentioned the NHS in their conversation. Some of the participants would mention the NHS without having a positive or a negative reaction. Mentioning the NHS was determinate for this column.

Column L (Had a positive reaction to the NHS): In this column we placed every conversation where the participant expressed a positive reaction centring on the NHS. These reactions can vary from ‘it is good’ to more profound positive reactions.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Column M (Had a negative reaction to the NHS): In this column we placed every conversation where the participant expressed a negative reaction to the NHS. These reactions can vary from ‘it is not working well’ to more profound negative reactions.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Column N (Wanted more resources for the NHS): In this column we placed every conversation where the participant wanted more resources for the NHS. Resources is understood in broader terms than just financial resources. Resources can mean more staff, better training, higher salaries for staff, etc.

Column O (Wanted less resources for the NHS): In this column we placed every conversation where the participant did not think the NHS needed more money, or that less money for the NHS would be their preference.

1. Percentage breakdowns.

The percentages breakdowns were calculated in two ways producing two sets of results. First, as a percentage of the overall number of conversations in a fieldwork location. Second, as a percentage of all the conversations in a fieldwork location that have respectively a mention of the bus or a mention of the NHS. Columns E-H + J are all the negative reactions to the bus and are recorded in the percentage breakdown as the percentage of ‘conversations that were overall negative’ for the bus. When combined the percentage of the overall negative reactions to the bus and the percentage of the overall positive reactions to the bus is not 100%, because we noted every reaction and many conversations had multiple reactions to the bus: two negative reactions, or a positive and a negative reaction, etc. The percentage breakdown is not based on classifying the reactions as either positive OR negative (where percentages for the positive and the negative reactions when combined would amount to 100%). The percentage breakdown reflects the richness, nuances and varieties in the data.

**Examples of nuanced negative reactions to the bus**

8A ‘fake news’

13A ‘not being true’

36A ‘complete hoax’

38A ‘manipulation’

39A ‘joke’

51A ‘a joke’

52A ‘complete nonsense’

57A ‘more or less false’

63A ‘propaganda’

65A ‘ridiculous’

71A ‘really, really bad’

75A ‘rabble rousing’

91A ‘propaganda’

95A ‘false advertisement’

115A ‘vote catcher’

116A ‘marketing tool’

117A ‘hypocrisy’

129A ‘colossal waste of money and time’

145A ‘not just that, we also get money’

147 ‘shit’

148A ‘con’

155A ‘a tool to get votes’

163A ‘rubbish’

164A ‘not true’

167A ‘crap’

169A ‘absolute rubbish’

170A ‘absolute rubbish’

172A ‘false advertising’, ‘misleading’

174A ‘fabricated figure’

175A ‘awful, just awful’

176AA many negative words

177A many negative words

2B ‘false’

3B ‘won’t make any difference’

23B hangs her head in her hands

25B ‘not true’

37B’ not true’

44B ‘a ploy’

50B ‘horrible’

57B ‘mess’

58B ‘shambles’

74B ‘deceit, it’s all wrong’

87B ‘rubbish’

115B ‘FAKE’

136B ‘a whole load of shite’

142B ‘crap, political rubbish’

159B ‘crap’

163B ‘false advertisement’ and ‘play on words’

176B ‘poor bus’ and ‘disgrace’

184B ‘propaganda’

**Examples of positive reactions to the NHS**

1A ‘NHS are good people’

23A ‘NHS is very good’

25A ‘The NHS is the best health institution in the world’

26A ‘Trusts doctors and thinks they are good people’

30A ‘The NHS is important to all of us’

37A ‘The NHS is marvellous’

43A ‘the NHS is a marvellous idea’

58A ‘always on everyone’s mind and needed by everyone’

60A ‘the NHS was the envy of the world’

63A ‘the NHS is particular to the UK’, ‘valuable’, ‘cherished’

64A ‘NHS is wonderful’

66A ‘brilliant institution’

67A ‘a lot of people cry for the NHS’

68A ‘NHS staff do a great job’

70A ‘the best in the word’ ‘we are all proud of it’

75A ‘grand institution’, ‘saved my life’

79A’ I would recommend it to anyone’

84A ‘The NHS are good people’

110A ‘the work of NHS staff is like the glory of God’

139A ‘saved my life a few times’

5B ‘we’d be lost without the NHS’

**Examples of negative reaction to the NHS.**

10A: ‘the cradle to grave system does not exist anymore’

24A: ‘GP would not prescribe medication, so friend almost died’

31A: ‘does not need money’

32A: ‘does not need money’

39A: ‘the NHS could not be worse’

40A: ‘no faith in the NHS’

46A: “NHS is crap’

67A ‘GP is crap’

68A ‘Managers get paid too much’

70A ‘NHS staff only go by the book’

73A ‘they don’t care for me so I don’t care for them’

85A ‘they pester me with calls’

90A ‘got worse and failed’

116A ‘the NHS is wasteful’

118A ‘NHS is inaccessible’

122A ‘noisy as a fairground’

131A ‘too many people work in it and there is not enough discipline’

134A ‘slow to treat and only works for poor people’

145A ‘GP is not personable’

146A ‘blames the NHS for the death of a friend’

2B ‘a lot of waste in the NHS’

3B ‘too much waste in the NHS’

18B ‘takes too long to get an appointment, too many foreigners’

19B ‘waiting times are atrocious’

27B ‘struggled to get follow-up appointments’

37B ‘too much middle management and waste’

42B ‘the system doesn’t work’

61B ‘too much waste, privatise it’

66B ‘the NHS is rubbish’

72B ‘shambles, back door bureaucrats’

135B ‘the NHS doesn’t exist’

**2. Interview Schedule**

We’re interested in what people think about Brexit and health, would you mind talking to us for a few minutes at this table.

* Do you recognise this? Picture of the bus. [Explain] Have you heard about Brexit?
* How many people didn’t recognise the image….
* What did you think when you saw the bus? Can you recall?
* We’ve left the EU now – we’re in a transitional period. What do you think now?
* Money; staffing; Boris Johnson/Aaron Banks/ (politicians)
* Line of questioning: Accountability; Legitimacy; Change

**Politicians/people**

* Do they perceive that the bus was true [LEGITIMACY]/false [ACCOUNTABILITY]
* Who should be held to account for the lie? What should the consequences be? [ACCOUNTABILITY]
* What do they perceive as the effects of that? What happened as a result? Was it a good thing? [LEGITIMACY]

**Money (for the NHS)**

* Do they perceive that the bus was true [LEGITIMACY]/false [ACCOUNTABILITY]
* Who should be held to account for the lie? What should the consequences be? [ACCOUNTABILITY]
* What do they perceive as the effects of that? What happened as a result? Was it a good thing? [LEGITIMACY]

**NHS (who works, who gets treatment, etc)**

* Do they perceive that the bus was true [LEGITIMACY]/false [ACCOUNTABILITY]
* Who should be held to account for the lie? What should the consequences be? [ACCOUNTABILITY]
* What do they perceive as the effects of that? What happened as a result? Was it a good thing? [LEGITIMACY]

**Catch all Basket (the US, Chlorinated chicken, lowering standards, lying/telling the truth)**

* Who do you think is responsible for this? What should the consequences be?
* Do you think this has had an effect? In what way?
* Do you think it’s a good or a bad thing?

**3. Positionality in the Field: Protocols and Reflexivity**

**Protocols**

We organised week long fieldwork trips to each location coinciding with moments during the Brexit process where the public were likely to be more engaged with information about Brexit, because of its salience in mainstream news media, and to have a relatively clear, basic factual understanding of specific moments in a highly complex legislative process. During each trip we chose a site (see Table A, below) that would be most likely to allow individuals matching the characteristics identified in Table 1 (high levels of multiple deprivation) to participate in our research. This was most likely to make our short fieldwork trips as efficient as possible in engaging relevant participants.

**Table 2: Fieldwork sites**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Newry** | **Derry** | **Rochdale** | **Rotherham** |
| Dates (2019) | 25-29 March | 19-23 August | 19-24 May | 10-14 June 2019 |
| Photo elicitation site(s) | Buttercrane Shopping Centre | Richmond Shopping Centre/ Lisnagelvin Shopping Centre | Yorkshire Street | Rotherham Market |
| Accommodation | Belmont Hall | Maldron Hotel | Flying Horse pub/ Broadfield Park Hotel | Carlton Park Hotel |
| Brexit event | First cancelled withdrawal date | Leaked No Deal preparations published in *The Times* | 2019 European elections | Conservative party leadership contest begins |

Two researchers (Ivanka Antova and Matthew Wood) undertook the fieldwork. Between 09.00-17.00 on each fieldwork day, they set up a table and four chairs in each location and approached passers-by to ask if they would consent to participating in the research. The table was draped in a cloth with University logos to identify both team members as University researchers.

**Reflexivity Notes**

22 August 2019

Sheffield

IA: One of my first impressions was the amount of people actively campaigning against Brexit. Within 10 mis of arriving outside University of Sheffield I was already speaking to two people about their campaign and our research. The place struck me as busy and engaged. Another impression was the fact that a high street, or what I perceived to be a public space, was actually ‘controlled’ by a private company and we needed special permission to set up and do our research. It was a shock. I liked the student area and thought it was really busy and diverse. Sheffield had some very posh middle class areas, as well as proper working class areas. A city of contrasts.

Gleadless Valley was an eye opener in many respects. I had to agree with some of the locals that there was no tangible evidence of EU funding in their particular area. A place centred around a pub, a chippy and a pizza/kebap place. And the church, of course. I was really struck by some people’s admissions that they and never been to the Valley before, and that people from both the Valley and Sheffield (well, the rest of it) admitted that the places are worlds apart.

Sheffield is the only place where we saw Remainers and Leavers get into a direct clash with each other over our table. This division is, of course, reflected in the polarised referendum result for Sheffield.

MW: My reflections are more specific on the place for the trail ethnography. That was a classic working class part of the town, right next to an old council building and so we had a few council employees there. But we were situated in between the kind of shops that working class people go to (A Poundland, a Greggs, a Shoe Repair shop, an old store of some description, a store where you get everything, like a working class John Lewis). Just around the corner there was a hipster coffee shop with friendly staff. One thing I recall was how quickly people started crowding around us. And the first man we spoke to: spawning incredibly, aggressive racist views. I remember thinking ‘what have we gotten ourselves into here?’ I remember a man walking down the other side of the street with an elaborate anti-Brexit double-sided poster, hand-written. He was walking brazenly. But someone shouted at him that he was quite brave walking around like that. It was too close to a recent vote in the House of Commons that had caused a lot of tension in the area. People were worried about no-deal. But we met plenty of pro-Brexit people. I was worried about my own safety. But our positioning was really important: it allowed us to attract these kinds of people we could get to know them, ask them questions about themselves and what they did. The first man I spoke to was quite shifty, something about troubles with the police. I was thinking that we have set ourselves up in a working class part of the city in such a way as to attract the exact people we want ed to talk to, the ‘left behind people’ the demographic of people who supported or voted to leave.

Newry

IA: Newry was the first place where I felt more ‘at home’. I had been there before, I knew what it looked like, I had contacts there and I felt a lot more confident then I felt in Sheffield. During this fieldwork experience I have realised how much an attachment, an emotional or even physical, attachment to a place can affect the way a researcher feels in the field.

I knew that Newry was a border town, that it was dispersed as population and that the city centre was relatively small. For whatever reason I thought it was going to be a poor and left behind area, but it did not feel like that. I actually thought it charming in a way.

Even though I had contacts and reaching out became easier in the second part of the fieldwork trip, I certainly felt like an outsider. There was something about Newry, something about bars with covers on the windows that suggested a secret, a culture that you either belong to or you don’t. I felt like I did not belong, even though no one was openly hostile. Some people took interest in my background. The bars we went to were bars where everyone seemed to know everyone and people were content to just sit and not even chat, a lot of socialble for them silences that left us ‘outside’ their conversations. There were a lot of bars with no people in them. We were sitting at the bars, in a way desperate to talk to bar men, waitresses, anyone who could give us some information about the place that we went to.

My most memorable experience was the Catholic Working Men Club. I had been told earlier that if I wanted to get to know ‘Newry culture’, or meet working class people in their most natural environment, I should go there. So I did, and I went in full of bravado and confidence. But realised almost immediately that I am the only woman there; the only foreigner; and the only person younger than 40. I practically ran away in the beer garden and chain smoked. I thought to myself ‘if this is what Newry culture is about, Newry will chew me up and spit me out’. It took me some time and some conversations with genuinely lovely and amusing ‘dirty old men’ with their lewd jokes to make me relax and get the kind of place Newry is. It is secretive, it is quiet, but all of this is a façade: you just have to break in as such. I ended up being invited to buy a house in Newry and move there. My prejudices are my own problem.

The shopping centre where we were situated for the fieldwork was in many regards completely typical, nothing fancy or out of the ordinary.

Upon entering Newry I recognised sectarian flags and banners. It was a quick reminder that this is a very Republican place, a very ‘green’ place. I wasn’t sure my personal politics would be welcomed, although I never discussed it. The tour of the border was truly fascinating. The most intimate description of a border that I have come across: families marrying across the border.

MW: I entered Newry with a significant amount of trepidation, seeing the flags and the banners at the fringe of the town, which I had never seen before, this imagery had a significant effect and made me think that this was a very different place, where the politics would be at the fore front of everyone’s mind. This was reinforced by us walking to the Railroad pub, pass these blackened windows and I felt uncomfortable. We found that the pub was a completely ordinary working class pub, quiet, with local people having their own conversations about local things. I thought we would get out more from talking to people in the pub and I guess that was a failed attempt to talk to people and get some interesting chats that would shed light on how people in the locale were feeling about Brexit. The people were there to have a drink and watch the football, not talk Brexit. So the fabled working class social arenas are just that, fabled, not really true, or it didn’t seem to me to be true.

We stayed in a frankly bizarre hotel. A huge mansion, or something like that. A hotel that you would find in a horror movie. High ceilings, cold. The site for the fieldwork was not particularly note worthy, we were sat outside Superdrug. People were genuinely amiable and answered a lot of our questions. It was easier than what I thought it would have been. The staff were very cooperative. I had certain romanticism about ‘left behind’ areas, but I found that people were just going about their daily lives in a fairly unremarkable way. We did hear horrible stories about people’s health and failing to get proper care. We heard people being fearful about a no deal Brexit. It struck me that people were articulating a sense of fear. Another thing I reflected on were the number of lorries that were coming across the town, all day long. It had a feeling of a backwater place, but in other sense it felt very busy and there was a sense of importance to the place, a constant stream of traffic coming through. The bus stop was large. Of course you are right next to the border and I thought it had the feel of a hub, or a wanna-be hub, a place that felt its own importance, even if it was never designated as such. But it was also a left behind areas with communities outside Newry being generally economically deprived, even if not vocal about it.

We met a few local authoritative individuals, sort of community heads and I expected that they would reveal to us something about the community. They didn’t, they told us a lot about what they did, or their organisations or charities did. I think I got a sense of how we would come back there and do more, there were pockets of groups that do stuff. Religion came up constantly as an important theme and people would weave it in the conversation in a way that I would never experience in the UK. I think this will be important for when we return, if we return.

Rochdale

IA: It sounds harsh, but Rochdale was the most difficult place for me to handle and feel comfortable in. Without wanting to reflect on this again, I was essentially assaulted on the street. Never have I lamented more my predicament as a woman, as a foreigner and as a relatively young person in an environment (politics, academia) that is male dominated and can be aggressive. There were multiple times when I felt condescended and patronised and that was a difficult contrast with how I think of myself in Belfast, for example (connected, openly political, standing relatively strong against every day sexism).

My first impression of Rochdale was the pub we were planning on staying in, The Flying Horse. I absolutely loved the pub and thought that its English charm and different atmosphere from the Belfast/Irish pubs I am used to was going to be a delicious and thought provocative introduction to Rochdale. But it really wasn’t. The rundown living quarters upstairs, with doors that wold not open, with bolted windows, with broken windows covered with black plywood, with showers that were purely for decoration and with mould and dampness in every corner was more of a metaphor for my impressions of Rochdale overall. I felt pure middle class entitled relief when we went to a different hotel. The staff’s admission that the rooms above the pub were for ‘working men only needing a bed’ made me as angry about the treatment of (my) working class as they made me think that this has been the attitude working class people in the area have experienced.

My next impression of Rochdale, on a Monday after 8pm, was that everything was absolutely closed and locked up. Empty streets, empty pubs, empty shops, shops for rent, a lot of charity shops, a lot of pawn shops, this was the Rochdale high street. It felt so sad, so unwelcoming, so hostile. We couldn’t find a place to be with the locals, I felt like a complete outsider in this town and missed Belfast like a child. I kept thinking that I will go home in a few days, but would I be able to live here, make a life for myself here? There must be people my age and with similar to mine views, where are they? Is there a secret place where they all go to that we don’t have access to? Is everyone at home? These were some of my thoughts at the time.

The next few days improved this first powerful impression. There have been attempts to make Rochdale more charming: a renovated central area, a new council building with a nice looking library and a café. Small pockets of interesting culture, a very imposing and dramatic Town Hall building, a beautiful park around the hotel. We realised the central area was where an Indian market/a farmers market was taking place almost every day and that pulled a diverse crowd our way. The weather was beautiful, I relaxed a little bit.

In terms of the people we spoke to, I had never encountered some of the characters that are discussed in relation to Brexit in the media. I met them in Rochdale: the old man lamenting the English Empire and wanting the Commonwealth to return; the racist working class man blaming his Muslim brothers and sisters for the downtrodden working classes; young people my age completely disengaged from politics and the reality surrounding them.

I was shocked by the amount of casual racism. ‘No offense to you, love’ became a catch phrase early on.

I absolutely loved the Rochdale museum and the Peterloo Massacre display and found myself loving the rebellious spirit of Rochdale. By the end I had convinced myself that if I were to stick with Rochdale for long enough I would love it and understand why it is important to get to know it.

MW: Rochdale was probably the most left behind town of all the left behind towns we visited. I got a real distinct feeling of faded glamour. Of old Town Hall, a couple of participants in our study noted quite specifically that it was a monument to their pride and their resistance, because Hitler supposedly wanted to steal it for the Germans. There was a really prominent war memorial, even two or three memorials around the centre of town which had been given such care and attention constructing them. Such care and attention was not given to a lot of the living quarters nearby, for example the Flying Horse. It was kind of ‘third world’ in character, the living conditions. An advanced capitalist liberal democracy would never expect to stay in such conditions. I found it difficult to stay in Rochdale, and this is very privileged and middle class, but the low quality of the food, including in our hotel, but also in the town centre, it was difficult to find nutrition, our participants had complex health needs. One woman that sticks in my mind was a woman who every time she would get anxious she would just eat, she was clinically overweight or obese. Her lack of confidence in herself struck me as archetypal for the town. Another thing that struck me were the Seven Sisters, the tower blocks just outside the centre. We walked around them and we knew that a few of them were marked for a demolition. Although we knew there was a grassroots struggle to keep them we couldn’t reach out to anyone involved in this struggle. We messaged newspapers, locals, etc. On the last day an ex Lib Dem MP for the area reached out, took us around in his car and casually showed us all the worse things about Rochdale. The fact that there was a sports centre built on contaminated land summed it up, as did the temporary shipping container style apartments that had been set up for MPs.

Rochdale was also deeply divided geographically. When conducting a tour of the town on polling day for the EU elections, we found areas with a concentration of Bangladeshi residents. On the tour with the Lib Dem former MP we were taken out to areas almost exclusively white working class. I got a sense that if we wanted a ‘representative sample’ of residents in the town, we would need to base ourselves in multiple locations, as many residents seemed to be too far outside the town centre with their own shops/amenities to travel into the centre. The MP highlighted how different the constituency of Rochdale was. This made me reflect that our data collection ought not to be misinterpreted as representative of the whole constituency.

In the evenings we tried to visit a couple of local pubs as in Newry, but soon abandoned this strategy. The pubs were desolate, nobody willing to talk to us, and we retreated to the only pub that partially resembled what we were familiar with – a hipster style pub opposite the old town hall. The evenings were warm and dry, but depressing. In the second hotel we stayed in I heard what could have been a car crash or car jacking one evening. That was about as noteworthy as it got. I reflected that we might need to spend a lot longer in Rochdale to genuinely get a sense for all the things going on in the town – but then I also reflected it was unlikely we would find anything noteworthy.

The new town hall was modern and surrounded by well landscaped buildings. There was a lot of building work going on, which we later found out was to build a new entertainment complex. It was painfully clear the new town centre was completely exceptional compared to the rest of Rochdale. One evening we walked a few hundred metres up the road from this new centre to find desolate, abandoned factory buildings and an almost completely abandoned shopping precinct with car park. This was opposite what we thought might be a useful place to visit – the local Labour club. What we found was a shuttered building alongside a number of other shuttered shops. It looked like years since the club had been used. We spoke to one participant during the day who was a Labour party member but was unaware the club existed. This particular encounter resonated with me for the rest of our stay – it was allegedly the EU elections and I expected local party activity aimed at drumming up voters to support an anti-Brexit MP, or pro-Brexit MP. No such ‘movement’ existed, it seemed.

Rotherham

IA: As I note, I would say that by the time we went to Rotherham we had our routine. Everything felt organised and following a logic. First impression was how upon arriving on the train station I couldn’t see where the town centre was. There was a long taxi drive to the hotel and seemed like Rotherham was a dispersed place. Unlike Rochdale, Newry and other places we have been. Before we even arrived in Rotherham we had done a lot of research and we knew about a Save Our NHS campaign. It seemed Rotherham would be a lot more connected to the topic of our research than Rochdale. We took a walk around Rotherham market – it was really interesting and an assault on the senses. I thought this is like a bog standard Bulgarian shop. The same goods being sold, same clothes. Like it was stuck in time capsule. Then we saw all the flags. Everything from a Rastafarian flag to a Confederate flag with a skull on it. The British and Irish flag peacefully coexisted for the sake of making profit. This stuck in my head given where I’m coming from.

The market itself was really sad. Like my initial impression of Rotherham. A lot of empty stalls. Overwhelming majority of goods were cheap. And it was leaking – there were buckets everywhere. On the first day it was raining. It really improved – what won me over was the people. The people of Rotherham were some of the friendliest English people I’ve encountered. Whilst in Rochdale it was difficult to find a formula to start a conversation, in Rotherham people were a lot more willing to talk and we started gathering conversations quickly. We met a wider range of views from people – political views and views on Brexit.

I loved The Trades – felt very at home when they handed us coffee in cracked mugs. It made me feel uninhibited. The play we watched brought tears to my eyes and I wish it would come over to Belfast where we could watch it. Loved the people we met around the play who were very left wing, very proud of their working class background and culture and who suggested there is a left wing opposition in Rotherham, something I never picked up in Rochdale. Where Rotherham completely disappointed me re: Brexit was the Labour organiser we met through Save Our NHS who at times was openly racist and made me ashamed that both of us call ourselves socialists. I also did not enjoy the lacklustre conversation with the Sarah Champion MP rep. It made a very strong negative impression. His comment that Sarah cannot work with campaigns that are too political (he meant the Save Our NHS campaign, a very grassroots trade union led campaign). There was some attempt to impose a toffish attitude on Rotherham and I hated it. I was very impressed with Rotherham council and how transparent they aimed to be and how genuinely interested they were in what we were doing and how we could cooperate. I connected it with Rotherham’s difficult history of child abuse and racism. I connected that with their openness and good will.

While there were shocking example of everyday racism: wondering why foreigners have money (question from one of the participants)and a lot of harmful stereotypes, one of the most powerful metaphors on Brexit comes from Rotherham. This was the metaphor used by the Syrian refugee who described Brexit as the severing of the head form the body and continued to explain the metaphor – the head, even though it has the brain, is useless without the arms and the legs, and the body. Another thing I noticed was the scarily large number of young people who either didn’t know about Brexit, they didn’t care about it, or they didn’t care about politics as a whole. It was that disconnect from political reality that became a key part of why Rotherham voted the way it did. That and lacklustre politicians and racist left-wing organisers.

MW: It struck me immediately as a spread out. I took a taxi there and the arrival felt very different. I didn’t see the city centre until we actually walked around there. It felt like a weird suburb. The town as struck me as grim, but not as grim as Rochdale. There were a couple of cafes that had lists of local events, one of which we attended in The Trades, a play about the miners’ strike. There was a feeling of culture, but that was juxtaposed to the very cheap shops we also found in Rotherham, next to the market; it was all kind of ‘knock down’ price cafes and gambling shops and so on.

The Market itself was a strange enclosed space. It was a particular type of shopping centre, unlike the other ones that we have worked in, for example in Northern Ireland. It was clearly working class in its history and it was old as well. It was managed by this company that we , I remember we walked upstairs to ask if we can set up and they organised everything for us, but I had to press this 70s looking buzzer and then this woman opened a window next to the buzzer, I thought she was going to open a door. It struck me as a massive throwback, an old fashioned shop stewards approach. We had a specified set out area for us to set up and initially this was difficult for us, because we were under a canapé of some sorts and we were not visible to other people, we were amongst these little huts that had been turned into shops. They were all kind of crammed very close to each other. It was difficult to open up in the space where were positioned in Rotherham. In some ways this was bad for reaching people, but it was also good: it was difficult for people to avoid us. Once we realised that we could directly approach people it got easier. We were set up right next to these tables and benches where people would be eating the food they had purchased from the food stalls. Everyday I would purchase a ham salad sandwich on a clearly supermarket bought white Kingsmill roll and I do recall thinking ‘This is something I have not eaten in years, and it cost £1.50!’ It struck me that we had definitely come across, or we were definitely positioned in a working class part of town.

We did go for a walk around the town. We walked around the very desolate new Rotherham stadium, kind of abandoned, post-industrial part of town. Much like Rochdale and maybe Newry I didn’t get the sense that something was lying underneath all of this, or at least something that we could access. It was raining a lot there, so there were not many people around.

When we sat for a few hours at the Rotherham Council meeting I did not find any revelations about how people of Rotherham felt. What I saw was a modern chamber and we were clearly announced as a research team coming from Sheffield The Chair of the session out of the blue announced it, it felt like it was special to them that we were there. But it didn’t feel special to me, if was a typical council meeting about why an area of town has more resources than another part of town. Just like Ivanka I felt there were people there who were trying very hard to get past the child abuse scandal and the terrible events that had happened. And the Council cover up, which was even worse. And also found people being very nice, very friendly, openly friendly, but there were lots of oblique references about what had gone on. I found that in the Market as well, people also reflected on that, people said that Rotherham had suffered.

These events at The Trades, the play, were interesting to me because they were typical of the events that happen in these places. There were a dozen of people sitting in a room that was clearly made for a larger group of people to fulfil that promise. After that standing at the bar people made oblique reference about how Rotherham had suffered.

Again, I was constantly aware of my diet and it not being what it usually would be. It struck me how cheap it was! This was partially true in Rochdale, but in Rotherham the cost of the food was the cost of a taxi, as we had a taxi back to the hotel a few rimes. I got a sense that people’s perceptions of money, or people’s expectations of quality and everything that they encountered fundamentally differ from what we would expect from middle class towns.

Derry

MW: What struck me about the Lisnaveigh area that we drove through in the taxi was incredible! in your face patriotism and nationalism that you never see in England, not even in Rochdale. British flag, British flag, NI flag, all along the way. The taxi driver on the way back, who was blatantly Nationalist, deliberately drove away from the flags, commented on them and asked me what I thought of them. The division is so apparent, so stark. My walk around the Free Derry corner was also a matter of a tourist attraction. There was a certain aspect of the history of the division of the city is flaunted. It is not really in the Free Derry part, but certainly in the centre and around the walls. Sanitised, depoliticised part of the city, where commerce and shopping are insulated in a way. Not entirely, because one of the things that completely stuck out for me was the guy using the metaphors of holding politicians by account with a Kalashnikov. If it was even a metaphor. That had a real effect on me.

IA: MW assumed that I know Derry very well. True, I have been to Derry many times. But my version of Derry has been either the touristy sanitised version of it, or going to the top of the Creggah area and participating in a Bloody Sunday commemoration march, which opened the door to Irish socialism and the fight for a united socialist Ireland for me. My Derry is a very particular, limited and selective version of Derry. This was the first time I had been on the other side of the river. I didn’t find the flags that shocking, but this is simply because they are all over Belfast as well, including in my neighbourhood. So I was prepared for them, or perhaps even desensitised to them.

The tour of the Derry Walls I thought was really interesting in some ways! I agree with MW that this was an example of ‘dark tourism’, or NI accepting that the Troubles are a part of the history, still very much part of the reality, but not deter tourists. I have been on Black taxi tours of West Belfast in a similar way, where many tourists visit the International Peace Wall every day. It felt strange to look upon the Fountain area (unionist) and the Bog Side area (nationalist) from the safe and elevated position of the walls, which have sustained, as we heard on many occasions throughout the tour, not one, but two 100 days long sieges. I felt safe and detached. The tour guide was diplomacy personified. But she did make a few references to how she used to conduct the tours during the Troubles and how she conducts them now, which made me feel that there has been a certain level of liberation, or a rejection of the Orange vs Green dichotomy. My friend Gavin, who is a prominent activist in the area, told me that many of the tours, most notably the Bog Side tours, are controlled and ran by political parties, mainly SF. Not the one we went to though.

MW: That was an official tour! The tour was clearly meant to be a soft tour, an open to all tour. You had soft trivia about the area, about the history of the building of the walls, the material used to it. You had several references to the Eurovision song contest. Several references to local bands and musicians, which at times felt slightly tedious to me, given the gravity of the events that took place in the city. When we finished it, and we walked strangely not around the entire circle of the walls, we probably did half of it, we missed out weirdly the Peace Bridge (over the river) and some fairly prominent landmarks in the city were left unacknowledged, which made me feel strange. The tour was more revealing about what it neglected.

MW: In the Richmond centre we set up opposite the Peacocks and opposite a cafeteria. We debated a little about how working class the area actually was. We met a few people who were very articulate and had very middle class jobs, like doctors and business people. So we made the decision to spend half a day on the other side of the river, following the advice of the friendly security guy who helped us set up the equipment every day. I was glad we moved sites for that period of time because I thought that we got to know a very different side of the city, had we presented our fieldwork back to the local audiences we would have had constant questions about why we missed out a certain part of the city. The other centre felt very different. There were a lot of people from the South. We were positioned just outside Tesco. We met people who were in favour of no deal. People felt more defensive and reminded me of Rochdale participants. Although that might be because the security guard at the other centre suggested that we might meet more drug dealers in the other side of the city.

IA: It came as a bit of a shock when the biggest shopping centre in Derry wanted to charge us £600 for the week to set up. My thoughts were that was a gross over exaggeration of the mall’s importance. I took a walk around it and it really wasn’t any different from any other place we have visited. The security guard at Richmond Shopping Centre suggested that it is more popular because it has M & S and a Boots, which made me think that these shops are perhaps associated with more affluent people. I was unsure about the type pf people we were meeting, mainly because to my eyes they were a very mixed bunch in terms of class. I spoke to people who were quite openly working class and not shy about it, most prominently the Paul’s Campaign activists. I also wanted to resist the temptation to suggest even in my head that working class people cannot be eloquent. However, when I saw the other place, yes, Richmond is more affluent. The other shopping centre was colder, emptier, greyer, with people who looked bisy, more tired, spaced out, reluctant to talk, in their jammies and house clothes, clearly running around to do chores, with kids, unable and unwilling to have a longer chat. By contrast, there were times in Richmond Shopping Centre when people were surrounding the table and chatting to us before we could finish recording the previous conversation. In the other shopping centre I met people who were open leavers, who appeared to me to be brazen about it, challenging me to dare to judge them. But at the same time I met a woman who kind of quietly told me, ‘Look, Ireland and Derry voted to stay, so don’t be surprised if myself and many others are angry! I wasn’t surprised’.

IA: I think it is important to note about Derry as a whole, that we have been referring to it as Derry the whole time.

MW: When in fact the local call it Stroke City to capture the ambiguity that they still feel between Derry and Londonderry. I thought it was politically incorrect to call it Londonderry, but I found people here who still refer to it that way without thinking.

IA: I also want to note that in comparison to Rochdale mainly, Rotherham, Sheffield, and even Newry to an extent, Derry was a lot less ethnically and religiously diverse. The overwhelming majority of people I spoke to were white and local. I actually ran after two participants to try and get them to talk to me, simply because they were of a different race!

MW: And I didn’t talk to anybody!

IA: The casual cruelty and feeling of never ending futility that took over me in Rochdale when I heard that many casually racist stories never happened in Derry. But I do note that we were in the city centre, close to the Bog Side, within the walls, in a shopping centre with around the clock friendly security, and that there is racism in Derry. I know there is, because I have visited the city as part of an all Ireland anti-racism network organising here.

MW: Derry had a lot of cultural confidence. Despite being similarly deprived in terms of demographics, economics and statistics, seemed to have a much stronger identity for itself and as our tour guide showed us as we started, this is organised around cultural phenomena like the TV series Derry Girls. We also heard multiple references to The Undertones. These cultural references were referenced to us with a sense of ride that you would just not find in Rochdale and Rotherham, and not that much in Newry. In fact, it reminded me more of urban Sheffield at times.

MW: And we stayed in a very nice hotel! It easily could have been the fanciest hotel in Sheffield!

IA: I note that as our last (possibly last) fieldwork site, we had our routine down to a t and everything worked out a lot easier. Having contacts in the area was very helpful. I did not feel like an outsider here, despite being one, the same way I felt helplessly in Rochdale and Rotherham. I didn’t feel it in Newry in this way, not did I feel it in Sheffield, because obviously there I knew people.

IA: I was surprised by the corporate and at times violent way in which Derry people referred to politicians. I also noted how different our reactions were to similar statements in Rochdale in particular. MW spoke to a man who was shouting about anal rape and I felt the need at the time to move behind MW and be there in case the guy lost it. I then spoke to a man who wanted to line politicians against the wall and shoot them! Neither me nor MW were amused, in fact we reflected negatively at the time. In Derry I spoke to a man who referred to the bus as the ‘bus that we put bombs under, don’t we?!’ And also said that this bus would never fit in the Bog Side streets. Another person told me that if a border is erected on that road over there, we’d better duck because bullets will start flying. A woman wanted to pull BJ’s ear and a man wanted to slap him. MW spoke to the Kalashnikov man, who saw Kalashnikovs as the legitimate way in which Derry people hold politicians accountable! Yet, we do not seem to be as disturbed by these accounts as we were in Rochdale.

MW: I was disturbed by the Kalashnikov guy, but more because he evoked The Troubles and the IRA. But it was very different to the heated anger and surprise I felt in Rochdale. Surprise particularly because there was no historical precedent that they were referring to. If anything, the Rochdale men sounded like militaristic fascism and evoked the British Empire. In Derry it was all directed at the British government, that was where the anger was! The violence was directed towards the occupationist and partitionist British forces. And indeed people blamed Brexit on English racism!

**4. Limitations on Data Availability**

Written fieldnotes were typed up using word documents and coded manually. Following conflicting feedback from reviewers, we decided to refrain from publishing the full fieldnotes in the Appendix to this article. This is due to the possibility that revealing the full fieldnotes in close association to this article could unintentionally lead to the publicising of data that could serve to further stigmatise the communities in question. Further information on materials related to the research, including records of fieldnotes, are available from the authors and the UK Data Archive (https://www.data-archive.ac.uk/).

1. Wood and Antova had different approaches to recording participants and conversations. Wood recorded conversations with multiple participants where more than one person spoke as one conversation under one participant number. Antova recorded conversations with multiple participants where more than one person spoke as separate conversations with separate participant numbers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See the list of examples of nuanced negative reactions below. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See the list of examples of positive reactions to the NHS below. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See the list of examples of negative reactions to the NHS below. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)